

# TOWN OF Shrewsbury

## Municipal Communications Plan

MARCH / 2023

EDWARD J. COLLINS, JR. CENTER  
FOR PUBLIC MANAGEMENT





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# Plan Introduction

The Town of Shrewsbury hired the Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management (The Collins Center) to provide a Communications Plan grounded in the Communications Assessment<sup>1</sup> completed earlier this year. The Town seeks to improve communication methods with all community stakeholders, especially those who may be currently underserved. The assessment found the Town of Shrewsbury's communications efforts are decentralized and lack a cohesive strategy, leading to varying effects and outcomes. The assessment's key recommendation was that the Town hire a dedicated communications specialist to develop a detailed communications strategy, implement consistent protocols for social media, website, and traditional communications, and oversee the use of these tools.

Based on the assessment's analysis, this plan recommends steps to create a solid foundation from which Shrewsbury can improve communication with residents, enhance transparency and accessibility to Town services, and develop thoughtful branding for the community. This plan is a living document intended to be adapted and enhanced in response to shifting needs within the Shrewsbury community and as communications technology and platforms for citizen engagement evolve.

## Plan Context

By commissioning a Communications Plan, the Town of Shrewsbury formally recognizes the importance of communications to daily operations in local government and to civic engagement. Many municipalities struggle with communication in a rapidly changing field. As traditional media outlets on the local level continue to close at alarming rates and individual social media use splinters according to demographic or other divisions, communicating with a community is increasingly difficult. Two-way communications are a gold standard for any organization, but figuring out how to build them into already overtaxed municipal operations can be a struggle.

Communication is what informs a community on their government's actions, decisions, and rules. It's also what can inspire residents to get involved and can ultimately determine whether a resident trusts their local government. The role of communication in civic engagement is so critical that the National Civic League's 2021 Model City Charter includes provisions that communications and community engagement be included in the municipal charter. Emphasizing the role of communications in engagement, the Model City Charter states, "The city shall treat engagement as a 'multi-channel' endeavor that includes face-to-face meetings, virtual interactions, and other online communications."<sup>2</sup> Communications can set the tone for community engagement, and ensuring communications reach all townspeople has ripple effects on matters of equity and transparency.



**A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN IS A GREAT FIRST STEP TO ORGANIZE AND COORDINATE THE TOWN'S COMMUNICATION EFFORTS AND TO ENSURE SHREWSBURY'S COMMUNITY FEELS INFORMED AND ENGAGED.**

<sup>1</sup> Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management. (February 2023). Town of Shrewsbury Communications Assessment.

<sup>2</sup> National Civic League. (2021). Model City Charter, 9th Edition. <https://www.nationalcivicleague.org/resources/model-city-charter-9th-edition/>

# How to Use the Plan

This Communications Plan is structured to be a helpful resource to guide future communications policies and strategies from the Town of Shrewsbury. It builds off the Communications Assessment<sup>3</sup> in which recommendations such as hiring a communications professional were offered. The Plan begins with communications goals developed from the project team's analysis of gaps and areas for improvement in the existing communication efforts of the Town. Throughout the plan there are a series of boxes of helpful details specific to communicating with Shrewsbury residents. The second section, Guidelines for Effective Communication, offers a series of best practices to guide future communications. The appendices offer links to tools for improving communications as well as required and recommended communications policies, and an analysis of the CivicPlus tools currently available on the Shrewsbury Town website.

## Plan Goals and Strategies

This section outlines action items for the Town to pursue to improve its municipal communications. Each goal is supported by at least one strategy, and each strategy has an objective to clarify its direction. Tactics for achieving each objective are offered; the Town may wish to include other tactics as well. These goals are offered as a baseline in the absence of a communications professional on staff. When and if a communications professional is hired, that person may wish to restructure the goals and their subordinate action items, and to add measures such as deadlines to the objectives. Where possible, the goals and their attending strategies, objectives, and tactics reference the Town of Shrewsbury 2030 Strategic Plan.

### GOAL 1: DETERMINE SHREWSBURY'S VOICE

The Town of Shrewsbury 2030 Strategic Plan's first Strategic Outcome Area, "Engaged and Connected," envisions a Shrewsbury that "engages residents and creates community connections that foster a sense of belonging through," among other means, "intentional inclusion and outreach to build trust."<sup>4</sup> To achieve these outcomes, and support the assessment's brand-identity and coherence recommendations, the Town and all of its departments and employees should communicate with one, unified voice.

#### Strategy 1.1: Determine the Town's Voice

**OBJECTIVE** Before launching the Town's communications strategy, establish the Town's voice, tone, and style.

- TACTICS**
- Hire a communications professional to guide the process of establishing a Town voice, tone, and style (see Town of Shrewsbury Communications Assessment)
  - Conduct an exercise with the Select Board, staff, and other stakeholders to agree upon a Town voice, tone, and style that reflects its values and mission
    - Summarize and share among all staff that perform communications
  - Develop or adopt a style guide for written communication (See Appendix A: Communication Tools for Municipal Governments)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Town of Shrewsbury (January 2023) Strategic Plan 2030. <https://shrewsburyma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/13810/Shrewsbury-2030-Strategic-Plan>

## GOAL 2: IMPROVE USE OF EXISTING COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS

The Assessment documented that, while Shrewsbury has many methods of communication in place, the Town lacks a coordinated, thoughtful plan to use the various tools in the most impactful way.

### Strategy 2.1: Improve Access to Information for All Residents

**OBJECTIVE** Evaluate and enhance communication tools based on Town demographics (see Appendix A: Communication Tools for Municipal Governments).

- TACTICS**
- Adopt an Accessibility Policy (see Appendix B: Required and Suggested Communication Policies)
  - Translate popular print materials into Shrewsbury's top languages (see Box 1: Shrewsbury Top Languages)
  - Add translation capabilities to mobile messages
  - Ensure online messages and photographs have subtitles and translation capabilities
  - Provide staff training on accessibility policy and inclusion tools
  - Ensure in-person meetings provide accessibility accommodations
  - Adopt and implement a plain language policy and training (see Appendix A: Communication Tools for Municipal Government)

### Strategy 2.2: Eliminate Extraneous or Redundant Methods of Engagement

**OBJECTIVE** Use data analytics to streamline communication and improve effectiveness.

- TACTICS**
- Explore combining Town Facebook pages
  - Remove redundant or inefficient listings on NotifyMe (see Appendix C: CivicPlus Notification Tools)
  - Delete Twitter accounts

## SHREWSBURY'S TOP LANGUAGES

Locating a distinct list of Shrewsbury's top languages is difficult because the Census and American Community Survey groups many of Shrewsbury's top languages. By cross-referencing data from the American Community Survey, Census, and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the following languages appear to be the most common languages spoken by Shrewsbury residents who speak a language other than English at home.

Chinese • Spanish • Portuguese • Arabic • Tamil • Hindi • Punjabi

For a better understanding of its language demographics, the Town may wish to collect data on household languages in its annual Town census.



### Strategy 2.3: Measure and Monitor Communication Tool Performance

**OBJECTIVE** Assess communications tools and methods on a regular basis to determine utility and efficacy.

- TACTICS**
- Require all departments managing communications tools to activate the data analytics within each digital media tool in order to track and assess key performance indicator (KPI) data quarterly and report results to the dedicated communications professional. All departments would need to activate the analytics on each communications tool in order to track and manage.
  - Continually analyze and streamline communication methods, directing the public to the right tools for the information they are seeking

### Strategy 2.4: Create Policies to Support Communication Goals

**OBJECTIVE** Set and share a cohesive suite of communications policies.

- TACTICS**
- Create and disseminate a privacy policy, plain language guidelines (see Appendix A), and standards for tone and content
  - Formally introduce the policies to staff and establish regular update and training schedules
  - Ensure continual and consistent centralized oversight of communications efforts

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## GOAL 3: FORTIFY ALL-COMMUNITY COMMUNICATIONS AND ENSURE INCLUSION OF SHREWSBURY'S UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

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As noted in the Town's Strategic Plan, expanding inclusion of underserved populations while building engagement and trust are key priorities. Launching a centralized means of informing residents about important Town announcements will improve access to universal information and will improve awareness of targeted messaging opportunities.

### Strategy 3.1: Improve Outreach to Community about Non-Emergency Information

**OBJECTIVE** Create a centralized communication tool that shares Town-related information with the general public to a) reduce misdirected inquiries, b) mitigate concerns about lack of communication from the Town, and c) improve overall outreach.

- TACTICS**
- Create a Town-wide regular digital newsletter that is distributed on a consistent and frequent schedule through email
  - Provide newsletter in multiple languages and allow opt-in for specific translations
  - Distribute printed newsletters to high traffic Town locations
  - Promote subscription to the Town-wide email newsletter on a regular basis (2-4 times a year) via Town social media accounts and targeted newsletters
  - Include links to the other newsletters (Select Board, Council on Aging (COA), Library) and Town social media accounts
  - Measure effectiveness of newsletter through key performance indicators (examples: number of subscribers, open rates, and click through rates) to inform future topics and phrasing

### Strategy 3.2: Expand Outreach to Specifically Target Underserved Residents

**OBJECTIVE** Ensure that Shrewsbury's underserved populations feel welcome and included, and increase these communities' participation in Town operations, events, and programs.

- TACTICS**
- Engage community partners to amplify Town messaging (see Box 2 on Community Partners)
  - Depending on the urgency and desired reach of a message, use as many town-wide messaging tactics as appropriate (see Box 3 on Town-Wide Messaging)



## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

The Town can communicate more successfully by partnering with community organizations and agencies. Partners can distribute Town messages to their clients, members, and parishioners through their own communications methods. Community partners may want the Town to promote some of their own activities and events in return. The Town will need to set a policy on what types of community events and information Town communication channels will promote. The Town should maintain positive relationships with its community partners by engaging with them on a regular basis.

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### Strategy 3.3: Improve Communication with Non-Governmental Town Leaders

**OBJECTIVE** Create or strengthen enduring relationships with community partners as stakeholders and as amplifiers for Town information and messaging.

- TACTICS**
- Convene regular meetings with local community service organizations to ensure everyone is aware of services, programming updates, and has a forum to discuss needs and concerns their organization or clients are facing<sup>5</sup>
  - Assign Town staff liaison responsibilities with appropriate external organizations to ensure ongoing two-way communication
  - Host special interest or topic forums and include partner organizations (see Appendix E: Public Engagement Examples)



## TOWN-WIDE MESSAGING

Emergency management plans often include town-wide messaging strategies. Shrewsbury has two plans (Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) and Emergency Dispensing Site (EDS) Plan) that provide a template for establishing a town-wide messaging strategy for non-emergencies. Town-wide messaging efforts are multi-modal.

To get critical information out to all community members, the following methods always should be utilized:

- Town-wide email list
- Town social media channels, both central and targeted
- Town website
- Press releases to local media outlets
- Cable access messaging
- Community partner amplification (see box on Community Partners)

Depending on the urgency of the message, the following methods also may be considered:

- Town-wide mailing, using USPS Every Door Direct
- Reverse 911 or CodeRED phone calls
- Texts, mobile push notifications, and short message service (SMS)
- Door knocking
- Electronic message boards
- Loudspeakers

Town-wide messages should be offered in Shrewsbury's top languages.

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<sup>5</sup> Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management. (February 2023). FY23 Needs Assessment & Service Delivery Plan: Town of Shrewsbury.



## GOAL 4: USE TWO-WAY INTERACTIONS AND ENGAGEMENT TO INCREASE TRUST

Citizen trust in municipal government is crucial for ensuring the success of public policies and projects. Regular, meaningful engagement builds relationships that translate into community confidence and trust. Providing opportunities for residents to participate in important matters further strengthens these relationships and outcomes.

### Strategy 4.1: Foster Two-Way Communication Opportunities Between the Town and Residents

**OBJECTIVE** Engage with residents to give opportunities for them to voice their opinions and provide the Town with feedback.

- TACTICS**
- As recommended in the Town's 2030 Strategic Plan, develop a Shrewsbury Citizens Academy and Town Ambassador program to increase resident engagement and knowledge of local government roles and responsibilities<sup>6</sup> (See Appendix E: Public Engagement Examples)
  - Conduct a community survey every two years through the centralized Town email list to better understand resident perspectives on Town government and provided services<sup>7</sup>
  - Utilize social media polling to increase engagement and expand community feedback opportunities
  - Conduct community wide surveys on major project proposals (see Appendix E: Public Engagement Examples)
  - Conduct focus groups to understand and enhance user experience of Town government (see Appendix E: Public Engagement Examples)

### Strategy 4.2: Create and Commit to an Organizational Culture of Consistency

**OBJECTIVE** As one of the first steps in the communications strategy rollout, establish structures to support a culture of consistency. All employees with responsibility for communications should be dedicated to responsiveness as a value and to a shared set of communications practices.

- TACTICS**
- Set policies for timely response and status updates for citizen requests (for example: 24 hours to acknowledge; 72 hours to reply with next steps)
  - Set communications content policies (see Appendix B: Required and Suggested Communication Policies)
  - Set expectations for leaders such as elected officials and department heads to adhere to the response and content policies
  - Ensure leaders reinforce the culture of consistency throughout their departments by prioritizing policy adherence during meetings with employees and volunteers
  - Build on SeeClickFix functionality to develop a more robust 311 system to manage citizen requests (see Appendix D: Municipal 311 Services)

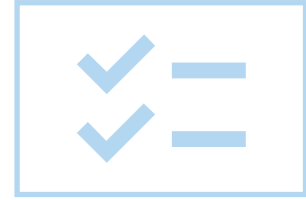
The goals, strategies, objectives, and tactics offered in this section are offered as specific recommendations to the Town of Shrewsbury based on the project team's analysis of the Town's current communication efforts. The following section summarizes best practices in municipal communications that can assist the Town in improving its communications.

<sup>6</sup> Town of Shrewsbury (January 2023) Strategic Plan 2030. <https://shrewsburyma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/13810/Shrewsbury-2030-Strategic-Plan>

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* p.15



# Guidelines for Effective Communication



The following information summarizes best practices for municipal communications, including a checklist to use for creating messages, details on the importance of mobile messages, when to use phone calls, the difference between targeted and town-wide messages, and how to use the Town's many communications methods strategically.

## Messaging Checklist

Follow these steps<sup>8</sup> to craft a message for any platform or tool

### ✓ Message Planning

Determine the purpose of the message

- Do you want the recipient to do something? Know something?
- Be clear on what you are asking for or expecting as a result of the message

Is the message targeted or town-wide?

Which platform and tools are appropriate to distribute the message?

Be thoughtful about the message scheduling

- If the message is a one-off, time it for during work hours
- If the message is to be repeated, decide on the frequency

### ✓ Message Release

Send messages in a timely manner

- Ensure the content is relevant
- Give the public enough time to accommodate the activity or attend an event (example: day-of event messages should be reminders, not the first time the event is publicized, same with survey deadlines)

Send the message during work hours

- Between 10 am and 1 pm may result in better open rates
- Do not send messages at night unless the message pertains to an emergency, in which case the Town's Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP) policies for messaging should be followed

### ✓ Message Creation

For emails and press releases, use a captivating but brief (less than 60 characters) subject line or title

Be brief

- Limit text messages to 160 characters or less to ensure message durability across platforms

Put the action or most critical information up front

- Ensure its clear what the reader should take from the message

Make it clear that the message is an official communication from the Town

Include contact information for follow-up questions

Link to more information

- Most text messaging platforms will do this automatically
- For longer messages such as social media posts or press releases, be sure to include links to more information

Use good writing practices, including:

- Keep messages simple and in plain language (aim for an 8th grade reading level)
- Avoid excessive capitalization
- Use Shrewsbury's voice

### ✓ Message Review

Ensure the message content and procedure follows applicable Town policies for approval

Always have a person who was not involved in the message creation proofread the message

Send a test message through each mobile messaging (email or text) platform to ensure readability and intact links

<sup>8</sup> Some steps were adapted from Kellner, L. (2020, November 2). *Guide: 4 steps for crafting effective government messages for mobile*. Retrieved February 10, 2023, from <https://www.rocksolid.com/blog/effective-government-messages-guide>



## MOBILE MESSAGES

Mobile messaging – including emails and text messages – are critical elements for modern communications strategies. Most Americans (85%) own a smartphone; underserved populations are most likely to be smartphone-dependent<sup>9</sup>, so incorporating mobile messaging is a good way to increase message reach. The Town should ensure all digital messaging, including its website, is mobile-device friendly.

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## WHEN TO USE PHONE CALLS

Phone calls are a critical communication tool for emergency communications. For non-emergencies, it is best to allow users to decide if and how they want to receive calls from the Town. For some residents, particularly those who do not use the internet or mobile phones, it may be the only way they will receive the Town's messages. For others, phone calls are a nuisance and misuse of the tool can lead to audience loss.

If the Town chooses an application to manage its centralized communication efforts that allows for phone calls, the Town should develop a specific policy identifying when it will use phone calls as a communication method.

THE FOLLOWING ARE BEST PRACTICES FOR INCORPORATING PHONE CALLS IN THE TOWN'S COMMUNICATION TOOLBOX:

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Do not have subscriptions default to receive calls – allow the user to opt-in for calls

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Allow the user to manage their preferences – to cease receiving calls, or to opt for emergency calls only

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Ensure your application allows you to call from a local phone number (preferably from a Shrewsbury government number)

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Keep robocall messages brief and to the point

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Include a phone number the recipient can call for more information

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<sup>9</sup> Pew Research Center. (2022, November 16). *Mobile fact sheet*. Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech. Retrieved January 2, 2023, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/#panel-8fffa996-faa6-4cee-ae6b-d58c239bc009>

## Targeted Communications Versus Town-Wide Messaging

A thoughtful communications strategy cannot be one-size-fits-all, particularly for municipal governments. It's important to differentiate between **targeted messages** – messages directed to specific audiences (in most cases, residents who are interested in one department's programs, services, and events) – and **town-wide messages** – messages intended to reach as many community members as possible. Targeted and town-wide communications may use the same methods, but the tools, scale, and frequency of messages may change according to their intended audience.

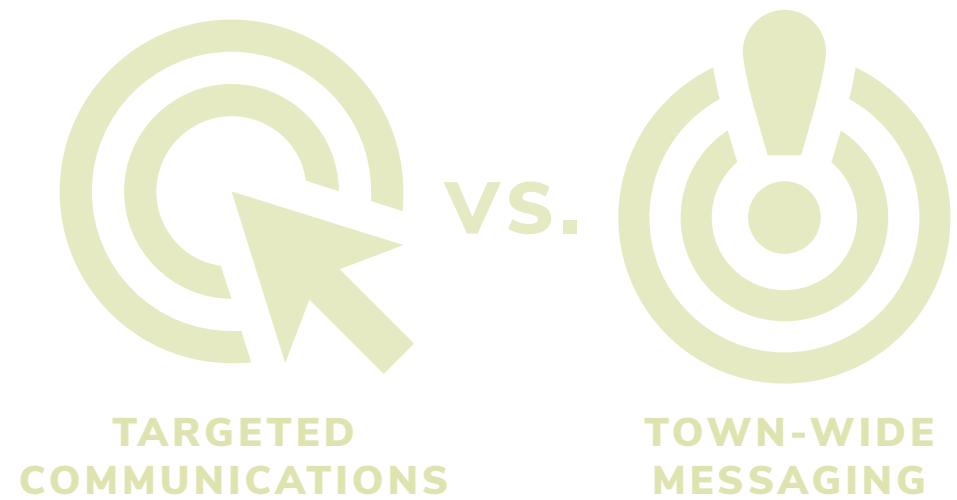
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Targeted messaging is personalized to the recipient individual or group and can build a feeling of trust between the audience and the department. Working with the Town's communications professional, departments utilizing targeted communications should establish clear goals and objectives that employ the right mix of messaging methods or tools. Key performance indicator data should be tracked to understand which types of messages and tools perform best among the target audience. Departments that compose targeted messages should abide by the Town's communications policies, standards, and brand identity.

Careful employment of both targeted and town-wide messaging makes each more effective. Strategically choosing when to employ each helps the Town avoid delivering unwanted or irrelevant information and, consequently, diluting the value, trust, and engagement of residents. Appropriately using targeted messaging also allows centralized communications channels to stay general and broad maintaining their relevance to the widest audience.

Targeted messages should always include a link to sign up for emergency and other town-wide messages. Shrewsbury's town-wide communications channels may wish to amplify some targeted messages or rephrase them in a way that is more general audience appropriate. The Town's existing three newsletters – Select Board, Library, Council on Aging – are great examples of targeted messaging. Issuing newsletters to targeted audiences makes sense if key performance indicators show the newsletters are read.

Some Shrewsbury municipal departments have for years been steadily building an audience and cultivating their own identities. As general town-wide communications expand, individual departments should continue messaging their specific audiences in concert with and in support of the Town's strategy. It is not recommended that targeted messaging be used by every Town department. Some departments, like Public Works, offer messaging that should be shared to all residents, but may need to communicate targeted messages about a specific ongoing project to a subset of the community. Most departments should use the Town's centralized channels for town-wide messaging and should be coordinated by the centralized communications professional.



## CHART 1. EXAMPLES OF AUDIENCES FOR TARGETING

Examples of Target Audiences	Examples of Targeted Messages	Examples of Targeted Methods	Include in Town-Wide Communications As Well?*
Families of School Aged Children	Afterschool programming opportunities	School newsletter or virtual backpack application	Occasionally, if seeking a wider audience
English Language Learners	English as a Second Language programs or services	Library newsletter, community partners like Beijing Language School, India Society, faith-based organizations, YMCA, and other organizations	Always
Homebound Residents	Book bus or other in-home offerings	Library and COA newsletter	Always
Older Adults	Senior Center programming	COA newsletter	Occasionally, if seeking a wider audience
Residents who attend Recreation Programming or frequently use Town Parks	Programming updates; new deadlines for registration	Recreation newsletter, social media	Always
Businesses	Economic Development opportunities; changes to licensing or permitting processes	Email lists from Planning and Economic Development or another department	Always
People looking for updates from the Planning Board	Planning Board agenda and minutes	Calendar or NotifyMe updates	Occasionally, if looking for Town-wide input

\*Inclusion in town-wide communications is important because not everyone who would benefit from targeted messages will have self-selected into that messaging channel. Some, like the schools and senior center, are likely to have the most relevant targets on their lists.






## Strategic Use of Communication Methods

Many routine interactions with the public benefit from using communications-informed strategies to set expectations and improve relations with both residents and staff. Ensuring the following interactions have set standards will improve public feelings about how the Town operates.

As discussed earlier, when Shrewsbury is choosing how to share information, the methods employed will vary depending on the intended audience and information type. Thinking through the various methods and tools available are key to effective outreach. The chart below highlights topics the Town uses in day-to-day communications and provides a quick reference about what tools are best and how often messages should be delivered. It is important to remember that as tools evolve and target audiences shift, the Town will need to adapt methodology to maximize impact.

 <b>CHART 2. COMMUNICATION METHODS BY ACTIVITY</b>									
Municipal Activity	Examples	Audience	Frequency	News-letters	Web-site	Social Media	Print (Flyers)	Notes and Supportive Tools	Additional Suggestions
<b>Services Requests</b>	Potholes, trash concerns, tree removal	Individual Residents	Set a standardized response policy for requests		X			Continue to accept web-based requests via SeeClickFix; maintain system for logging and tracking requests	Social media and newsletters can be used to periodically alert residents to reporting options; consider 311 technology/program
<b>Bill Paying</b>	Routine bills (tax, utilities); tickets	All residents and businesses	As needed		X		X	Pay online capability; in-person options; mailed bills inserts for town-wide information	Social media and newsletters can be used to periodically alert residents to online options; printed bills should have online payment options, as well as phone/email for questions
<b>Major Town Projects</b>	New buildings; infrastructure improvements; disruptive roadway projects	All residents; affected area businesses	Minimum twice a month	X	X	X	X	Community forums and/or focus groups for long-term and/or major projects; NotifyMe	Video content can be compelling for project introduction or updates; major project updates should be accessible

## CHART 2. COMMUNICATION METHODS BY ACTIVITY

Municipal Activity	Examples	Audience	Frequency	News-letters	Web-site	Social Media	Print (Flyers)	Notes and Supportive Tools	Additional Suggestions
<b>Service/ Program Information</b>	Tax abatement; Recreation or Library programming	Targeted residents or businesses	Frequent announcements, first release no later than 2 weeks prior to program; showcase program after on social media / newsletters	X	X	X	X	Focus on the communication tools used most by the targeted audience or department (see plan section on targeted messaging). Issue press releases to media outlet for major events..	Ensure that the town website calendar has programming from all departments in a centralized place
<b>Community Engagement</b>	Community participation events (touch-a-truck days; community planning charette)	All residents	At least 2 weeks prior to event; showcase event after on social media / newsletters	X	X	X	X	Distribute press releases to media outlets; use targeted strategies, if appropriate, for the intended audience; electronic signboards, when appropriate.	Photos and event videos can be used to build an archive for other communications efforts
<b>Opportunities to Get Involved in Town</b>	Board / Committee vacancies; focus group recruitment	All residents	Periodically spotlight volunteer contributions; regularly link to application	X	X	X	X	Community forum / volunteer fair; NotifyMe interest area alerts	Information flyers and application forms should be available at Town Hall year-round and distributed to COA, Library and other town gathering spots during active recruitment periods. Printed materials available in multiple languages.
<b>Major Events</b>	Town Meeting; Spirit of Shrewsbury	All residents	List on website and calendar as soon as date is set; post on social media every other day for 2 weeks prior to event; distribute flyers within 2 weeks of event	X	X	X	X	Electronic sign board notices one week before the event; ensure video content is created at event for post-event publicity and archives	Consider creating video promotions of major events.

## CHART 2. COMMUNICATION METHODS BY ACTIVITY

Municipal Activity	Examples	Audience	Frequency	News-letters	Web-site	Social Media	Print (Flyers)	Notes and Supportive Tools	Additional Suggestions
<b>Agenda / Minutes / Meeting Videos</b>	Zoning Board of Appeals meeting	Interested individuals and impacted businesses	Agenda / Minutes posted online as required; videos as soon as available		X			NotifyMe; email distribution	Sharing information on high interest public hearings or upcoming town-wide discussions through newsletters and on social media can increase awareness and engagement
<b>Job Openings</b>	Town positions	Potential employees	As needed (ensure filled positions are removed)		X		X	Include link to application on website	Include openings in routine all-employee emails to encourage internal and referral candidates; may spotlight job openings in newsletters or on social media if desired

Even for the categories above that do not specify using newsletters or social media as a tool for communicating about the topic, it is useful to occasionally post community reminders through those methods. For example, when seeking volunteers for appointment to boards and committees, messages about specific vacancies can be included on Town social media. The key is to maximize exposure of certain notices without clogging the messaging in any one method.

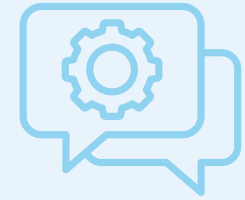


## CONCLUSION

The Town of Shrewsbury is well positioned to improve and enhance its communication efforts. The existing tools, especially the website, are well designed and impactful. What is most lacking is dedicated oversight of the Town's communication efforts and a cohesive strategy to meet communication goals. It is recommended that the Town of Shrewsbury hire a communications professional – or contract with an external firm or individual – to create and implement a comprehensive communications strategy, including policies, training, and oversight.

This plan provides data, analysis, and recommendations that will be the building blocks for implementing a coherent strategy for Shrewsbury. With the recommended internal professional focus, it will help Shrewsbury meet its communications goals.

# Appendix A: Communication Tools for Municipal Governments



The blue, underlined words below are hyperlinks to the tools described. To access a tool, click the hyperlinked (blue, underlined) words when reading this document on a computer.

## TRANSLATION TOOLS

[Localize](#) helps government agencies and municipalities provide their communities with essential services and information in the language they understand best. Automated content detection and delivery system coupled with advanced translation management helps remove language barriers and disparities quickly and easily. Pricing ranges from \$275/month - \$625/month.

[Para-Plus Translations](#) is a translation and interpretation company offering global translation and interpretation services to governments and municipalities to reduce disparities and inequalities. They offer transcription, voice-over, sign language and Braille services in more than 100 languages.

[Government Machine Translation Software](#) master list. Machine translation software facilitates the translation process by translating text automatically from one language to another without the need for human editing.

## STYLE GUIDES

A style guide is a collection of conventions for writing for an industry, brand, or project. [Commonwealth of Massachusetts Style Guide](#) provides clear guidelines for government agency communication. While Shrewsbury will want to determine its own voice, as discussed in the plan, the style rules herein are strong guidelines.

[AP Style Guide](#) is the default standard for consumer communication and can supplement the Style Guide above.

[City of Boston Style Guide](#) describes preferred voice and references AP Style Guide for standards.

There are a few other [main style guides](#) that the Town may find helpful to improve communications.

## PLAIN LANGUAGE CHECKLIST

[Readable](#) is an online tool that assists in improving text readability. Free usage of Readable is limited.

[Text Readability Consensus Calculator](#) uses seven popular readability formulas to calculate the average grade level, reading age, and text difficulty of sample text.

## COLOR CONTRAST CHECKER

Contrast and color use are vital to accessibility. Users, including users with visual disabilities, must be able to perceive content on the page. Use a [Contrast Checker](#) to ensure a contrast ratio of at least 4.5:1 for normal text and 3:1 for large text.

## POLLS AND SURVEYS

Polls or surveys are great for getting feedback and giving residents an opportunity to share their opinions on city matters.

Several social media sites, such as [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#) have options that let accounts easily incorporate simple polls into posts.

## ADA CHECKLIST

Many Microsoft 365 applications include an [Accessibility Checker](#) that finds accessibility problems and lists suggestions for making content accessible to all on Outlook, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, OneNote, Sway, and Visio.

The Collins Center provides a comprehensive audit of ADA accessibility guidelines for municipal government websites.



## CONTENT CREATION

[Hashtagify](#) is an Instagram and Twitter hashtag tracking tool. It allows a user to find the best hashtags to reach an audience, gives custom suggestions, and helps identify influencers and competitors.

[Trendsmap](#) is a Twitter trend tracking service that sticks tweets onto an interactive map, then onto a Google Map where users can sort by city or general region and see trending topics in real-time. It offers real-time geographic visualization for emerging Twitter trends.

## CONTENT CLEANING

[TweetDeleter](#) allows the user to search through all their tweets by likes, keyword, date, type, or media, and delete selected tweets with one click.

[Social media archiving tools](#) enable organizations to archive all social media posts and activity for compliance purposes. Tools can capture and archive posts from Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Sales Navigator, Tumblr, YouTube, and more.

## CONTENT MANAGEMENT

Screen readers are software programs that allow blind or visually impaired users to read the text that is displayed on the computer screen with a speech synthesizer or braille display. Utilize a software from this [list of screen readers](#) to check that their documents are accessible before uploading.

The [Wayback Machine](#) is a digital archive that allows users to go “back in time” and see how websites looked in the past.

[Hootsuite](#) is a social media management platform that supports network integrations for Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube, and TikTok. Plans range from \$99/month (up to 10 social accounts) to \$739+/month (up to 35 social accounts).



# Appendix B: Required and Suggested Communication Policies

Municipalities use communications policies to set the rules and expectations of their communications practices. Communications policies are intended to ensure that communications are effective and accurate, are consistent with the goals and values of the municipality and meet legal requirements.

All policies should clarify the communications media and modalities covered by the policy. The content standards should apply to email, print media, social media posts, phone calls, and live media events such as press conferences or television coverage. Determine and state whether there are any employees, officials, or departments exempt from any part of this policy, or, conversely, if the policy extends to Town volunteers or contractors.

## Required Policies

The following policies are required by law.



### ACCESSIBILITY

Guarantee that content is accessible to residents with disabilities. Accessible communications are required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), including on social media, where posted images must be accompanied by descriptive text.

From the United States Department of Justice:

“Communication is an essential part of providing service to the public. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires state and local governments to communicate as effectively with people with disabilities as with others. Because the nature of communication differs from program to program, the rules allow for flexibility in determining effective solutions. Sometimes the solution will require the state/local government to provide aids or services, like a sign language interpreter.”<sup>10</sup>

### PRIVACY POLICY

The Town is required to post privacy policies on their municipal website. The presence of privacy statements can improve public perception and trust and enable greater citizen engagement with government.

A privacy policy should identify:

- What data is being collected on the site
- The intended use of users' data
- Whether personal information be disclosed to third parties
- Whether the site uses cookies
- Specific contact information including an email address for further information

<sup>10</sup>State and local governments. ADA.gov. (2023, February 1). Retrieved February 2, 2023, from <https://www.ada.gov/topics/title-ii/>

## Recommended Policies

The following types of policies, listed alphabetically, are recommended to ensure professional communications and conduct.

### APPROVAL

- Establish which Town roles or positions have authority over given communication methods.
- Specify what approval is required for the creation of a Town department social media account, email list, or webpage, and designate the employee or official who has the authority to sanction.

### ASSIGNMENTS

- Clearly delineate the departments or positions that are responsible for specific communication methods and tools.
  - For example, each employee is responsible for their own email account, phone or video calls, while a specific department member is responsible for a departmental social media account or for departmental content on the Town website.
- Establish or clarify which position oversees coordination of messaging.
  - For example, for a Town newsletter comprising regular updates from multiple departments or programs, one position is responsible for managing the timeline for submissions from each department and for editing content for consistency and clarity.
- While all content generators should be trained in the communications policies, one employee should be responsible for reviewing content for adherence to the Town Communications Policy.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

- Train account users on conflict-of-interest laws as they pertain to advertising, endorsement, political messaging, etc., in official Town communications.
- Determine which employee position grants others administrative access to the Town website.

## Examples

The following municipal communications policies were referenced in the development of this resource and may be helpful in developing Shrewsbury's communications policies: [Andover, Massachusetts](#) [Dryden, New York](#) [Winchester, Virginia](#)

### CONTENT STANDARDS

- Describe in detail the guidelines for the written or spoken content of official messages.
- Establish expectations for essential elements of official messages, especially word choice and tone or "voice". Describe the way account users should represent the Town.
- State that the Town reserves the right to remove content that violates this policy.
- Set and mandate training for account users regarding First Amendment issues in social media.

### INCLUSION

- Ensure that content is developed and delivered with all residents in mind.
- Town content should be available in Shrewsbury's top languages.<sup>11</sup>
- Town communications should reflect town Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) policies.<sup>12</sup>

### PERSONAL ACCOUNTS

- Set rules for usage of employees' personal email or social media accounts, etc., as they relate to Town business.

### POLICY VIOLATIONS

- Determine the steps taken when the communications policy is violated, either accidentally or intentionally.

### SECURITY

- Mandate best practices regarding passwords and multi-factor authentication, such as those described here.
- Describe steps all account users must take if they suspect an account has been compromised, including password resets and specified officials or employees to notify.

<sup>11</sup> Town of Shrewsbury (January 2023) *Strategic Plan 2030*  
<https://shrewsburyma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/13810/Shrewsbury-2030-Strategic-Plan>

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* p.19

# Appendix C: CivicPlus Notification Tools



CivicPlus websites offer many tools that can be helpful for pushing messages out, as long as it is clear to the user what they will be receiving, and the tool does not duplicate messaging that is broadcast elsewhere more effectively. To be successful, the tools must be utilized with an appropriate frequency. It can be confusing for the public if there are too many ways to sign up for messaging from one department. For example, if a resident wants to receive all news about the senior center and its programming, but only signs up for calendar updates because that is the most easily found tool, they may miss out on the newsletters.

Below are some of the accounts listed under the CivicPlus notification tools. During interviews with department heads, the project team found that half of those interviewed were either not aware of or did not use the CivicPlus tools. The project team recommends the Town review subscriber counts, account status, and key performance indicators to streamline the number of accounts available to the public.

The following News Flash categories have zero items posted. It may be more impactful to include information for these categories in the Town's central newsletter, or targeted audience newsletters, rather than list as an option for inclusion on CivicPlus.

NEWS FLASH CATEGORY	ITEMS	STATUS	SUBSCRIBER COUNT
2022 Redesign	0	Active	0
Tobacco	0	Active	8
Sanitary Sewer Overflow Reports	0	Active	12
Shrewsbury Strategic Plan Project	0	Active	20
Community Preservation Committee	0	Active	29
Shrewsbury Development Corporation	0	Active	59
Electronic Voting Study Committee	0	Active	63
Public Lands Committee	0	Active	70
Retirement Board	0	Active	70
Master Plan Implementation Committee	0	Active	86
Historic Preservation Committee	0	Active	87
Beal Building Reuse Committee	0	Active	90
Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee	0	Active	91
SMC Programming	0	Active	100
Commission on Disabilities	0	Active	108
Zoning Board of Appeals	0	Active	110



NEWS FLASH CATEGORY	ITEMS	STATUS	SUBSCRIBER COUNT
Complete Streets Committee	0	Active	111
Beal Early Childhood Center Building Committee	0	Active	124
Public Buildings	0	Active	128
Town Moderator	0	Active	130
Treasurer's Office	0	Active	149
Employee Benefits	0	Active	175
SELCO Commission	0	Active	187
Conservation Commission	0	Active	212
Town Finances	0	Active	219
Fire Department	0	Active	635
Library	0	Active	712

The News Flash category with the most postings was the Health Department, with 39 postings. That does not indicate heavy use of that category. It may be that all the News Flash topics may be better communicated via other methods.

This does not mean that the information in these categories is not of interest to the community. Below are the News Flash topics that have over 500 subscribers, many more have over 100 subscribers. The Town needs to be strategic about which tools it uses and provide a streamlined way for residents to subscribe to both targeted and town-wide updates.

NEWS FLASH CATEGORY	ITEMS	STATUS	SUBSCRIBER COUNT
Solid Waste & Recycling	12	Active	2000
Health Department	39	Active	1886
Emergency Management	1	Active	1299
Parks & Recreation	18	Active	907
Water and Sewer Division	10	Active	847
Community Emergency Response Team	1	Active	792
Library	0	Active	712
Police Department	3	Active	657
Fire Department	0	Active	635
Highway Department	10	Active	633

Hosting a central calendar for Town meetings, programming, and events is an excellent communications strategy. Allowing individuals to self-select which boards or departments events they follow is a great targeted communications strategy. The following Calendar categories have no subscribers, but it could be because those committees have been recently formed.

## Calendar

CALENDAR CATEGORY	EVENTS	SUBSCRIBER COUNT
Diversity Equity Inclusion & Belonging Committee	1	0
Main Calendar	868	0
SELCO Commission	90	0
Senior Center Menu	3	0
Sewer Commissioners Meeting	2	0

Below are the Calendar categories that have fewer than 10 events posted. Those may be considered for elimination if the Town deems the Calendar listings to be an unsuccessful strategy. All category names should be fully spelled out, a title like "LQC" below will be confusing for residents who are not aware of acronyms.

CALENDAR CATEGORY	EVENTS	SUBSCRIBER COUNT
Community Preservation Committee	0	22
Diversity Equity Inclusion & Belonging Committee	1	0
LQC	1	12
Shrewsbury Strategic Plan Project	1	17
Treasurer	1	31
Complete Streets Committee	1	51
Sewer Commissioners Meeting	2	0
Senior Center Menu	3	0
Affordable Housing Trust	4	14
Insurance Advisory Committee	4	25
Master Plan Implementation Committee	4	51
Police Station Municipal Campus Building Committee	6	21
Historic Preservation Committee	6	45
Public Lands Committee	7	28

CALENDAR CATEGORY	EVENTS	SUBSCRIBER COUNT
Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee	8	39
Electronic Voting Study Committee	9	31

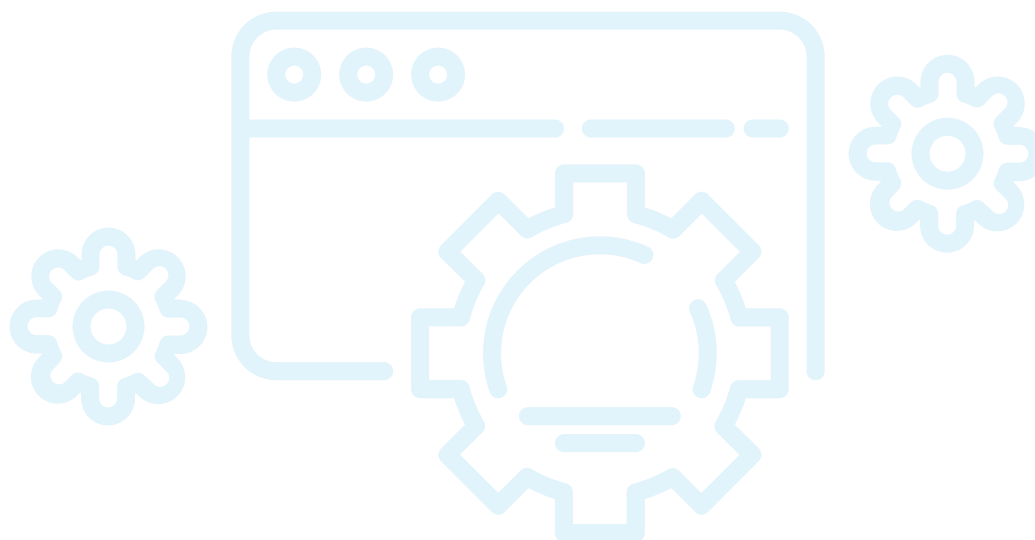
Finally, NotifyMe seems to be utilized for newsletter registration, which seems appropriate. If NotifyMe is not the tool used to send the newsletters, the Town will want to ensure that newsletter tool(s) are updated regularly with the addresses from NotifyMe.

## NotifyMe

NOTIFYME CATEGORY	STATUS	SUBSCRIBER COUNT
DRC Schools & Renters	Active	76
Parks & Recreation Newsletter (Newsletter only)	Active	1499
Senior Edition Newsletter	Active	581
Shrewsbury Economic Quarterly Newsletter	Active	2

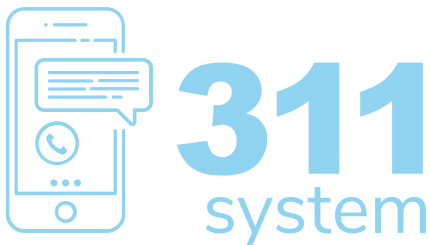
Additionally, there are multiple categories listed under both Bid Postings and Government Jobs. The project team suggests the Town reviews how these categories are utilized. It may be more effective to have one News Flash or NotifyMe category for all “Bid Postings” or “Government Jobs”.

The project team suggests streamlining the communication tools available through the CivicPlus platform. It should be clear to a user what a News Flash is, how it is different from a Calendar posting or a NotifyMe message, and whether signing up for the Town’s newsletter would be a better fit for their needs. Utilize remaining News Flash, Calendar, or NotifyMe topics with an appropriate frequency. Delete one-off project accounts upon project termination.



# Appendix D: Municipal 311 Services

In 1997, the Federal Communications Commission set aside the number 311 as a dedicated number for non-emergency local government services. The designation was designed to reduce non-emergency calls to the emergency 911 system. Today, most larger population Massachusetts communities employ this system to improve communication with residents and manage maintenance requests. Several smaller communities have also begun using this system (see below). The system improves two-way communication, government accountability, and internal tracking of resident requests. SeeClickFix systems can be expanded to include robust 311 programs ([link here](#)).



Cities with 311 Systems in Place		
Boston	Cambridge	Everett
Haverhill	Newton	Medford
Revere	Salem	Somerville
Springfield	Worcester	

Massachusetts Municipal 311 Programs (examples)
Andover (population 9,000) <a href="#">Andover 311 program</a>
North Attleborough (population 30,834) <a href="#">North Attleborough Big Red Program</a>
Watertown (population 35,000) uses enhanced SeeClickFix system <a href="#">Watertown Report It program</a>



# Appendix E: Public Engagement Examples

Many of the objectives of this plan rely on establishing trusted pathways to community engagement. Below are some examples of other towns that have used some of the tools suggested in this plan. These methodologies can be employed to begin conversation with any subset of the community and be tailored for efficacy. For example, holding focus groups in person at Council on Aging facilities to discuss issues impacting the older adults may be more impactful than hosting a virtual meeting because this demographic may be reluctant to engage on virtual platforms. Identifying the audience input sought and tailoring the engagement to that population will increase engagement and communication.

## Community Ambassador Programs

### Climate Resilience

[Medford Resiliency Hubs](#)

### Community Engagement

[Plymouth Ambassador Program](#)

### Economic Development

[Pittsfield Downtown Ambassador Program](#)

### Urban Agriculture Initiative

[Somerville Urban Ag Ambassador Program](#)



## Special Interest/Targeted Focus Groups/Surveys

Topics for discussion vary on community needs. Many communities use forums, focus groups, and/or surveys to gain insight into resident concerns or to engage the community on important town decisions.

### School Community Forum

[Brewster Elementary Schools](#)

### Community Program Introduction

[Cohasset Community Electricity Aggregation Program](#)

### Proposition 2 ½ Override Campaigns

[Marblehead Operating Budget Shortfall Campaign](#)

### Business Development Forum

[Amherst Downtown Forum](#)

### Major Public Park Development

[Southborough St. Marks Park](#)  
[Scituate Pier 44 Redevelopment](#)